

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

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CONTENTS

Love

Jim R Walkinshaw
Page 1

Preparation

Jim T Brown
Page 3

Marriage in The Lord

Richard M Brown
Page 6

The Sufferings of Jesus

Mark I Webster
Page 10

“Conformed to The Image of His Son”

Alistair M Brown
Page 19

With Christ

Paul Martin
Page 27

LOVE

Jim R Walkinshaw

Galatians 2: 20

John 13: 1

Ephesians 5: 22-33

I had an impression to say a few words with the Spirit's help in relation to love. It seems to be an appropriate thing to speak about at a wedding. It is a very wide subject; there is much running through the Scriptures in relation to love. I was thinking of the example we get from the Lord Jesus Himself as to love; firstly as to what is individual; then in relation to those who we might call our own, our brethren, then in relation to the family setting and in relation to the assembly. My desire is to make much of the Lord Jesus Christ and His love. There is no doubt as to the love of the Lord Jesus. There is no doubt of the love of our brother and sister for each other, but I think as our brother and sister and all of us continue our pathway here, if the Lord leaves us here, it would help and encourage us to get a fresh impression of the love of the Lord Jesus.

The apostle speaks of "the Son of God, who has loved me and given himself for me". I trust that everyone here can start there. You, young ones: get an impression in your soul in relation to the love of the Lord Jesus. He has loved you and given Himself for you. I believe our brother and sister may have started there in their own individual experience, they came to know the love of the Lord Jesus themselves, individually. How great and sustaining that is; as you go through life, and the trials and tribulations come, you can rely on the love of the Lord Jesus, One whom the apostle says "has loved me and given himself for me". It is very precious to have that realisation in your soul. The Lord Jesus said Himself, "No one has greater love than this, that one should lay down his life for his friends", John 15: 13. May we have a fresh impression every one of us, from the youngest to the oldest of the love of the Lord Jesus and may it sustain us here despite whatever may come in.

In this verse in John 13 it says of the Lord Jesus, "having loved his own who were in the world, loved them to the end"; that is the company. I think we need to get some impression in our hearts of the love of the Lord Jesus for the company, for those who are His own, those who have committed themselves to Him. I was thinking too of the

hymn that says,

The love that gave Thyself for us
Forgotten cannot be;

(Hymn 326).

If we have an impression of the love of the Lord Jesus individually, it will draw us together as a company with a common object to be here in relation to that blessed One. You think of this company here today, smaller than we would have hoped, smaller than we would have liked through the health restrictions brought in, but I think we can get an impression as we gather together in this way of the love of the Lord Jesus, the love of the Lord Jesus for this company. How He delights in it, to see a company of those that know His love individually, but they that are prepared in faithfulness to Himself to gather together to His Name. I believe that is a word for our brother and sister, to love the brethren, to learn from the Lord Jesus in relation to love, One who loved His own. We look at Him as an example; He is One who is unique; He loved His own and He loved them to the end and He loved them through everything. What He went through for this little company here: what He went through for each one of us here! But we are to learn from that and we are to learn to love the brethren.

I just want to touch on 1 John 3: 13, 14, “Do not wonder, brethren, if the world hate you. We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren”. As we love the brethren, and as we desire to be amongst the brethren, I believe we will know what it is to experience what John says, we pass from death to life. You think of the situation in the world around, the situation with death on every hand, the fear of death marking men as never before. We should know what it is to learn from the Lord Jesus to love the brethren, and we will know what it is to pass from death to life, what a wonderful matter that is!

I was not going to say too much about the exhortations as to wives and the exhortations to husbands in these verses in Ephesians; they are well known and the scripture sets them out very powerfully and very positively, but again that we might learn from the love of the Lord Jesus: “even as the Christ also loved the assembly, and has delivered himself up for it”. What a love that is; I believe that the character of that love, not by any means the strength, or the power, or the efficacy of it, but the character of that love can mark us in our pathways here, as we know what it is in our family settings to love even as the assembly is loved by Christ. Then He says, “even as the Christ also loved the

assembly". That would suggest that the character of that love is something that we are able to partake of and to enter into. As we are the subjects of it, we are to know something of it. May our brother get some impression in relation to that and know, learn from our Lord Jesus Christ what that love is so that when the exhortation says "Husbands, love your own wives", it would be in that character of love shown by the Lord Jesus Himself: One who was prepared to deliver Himself up for it. How much the assembly cost Him! What an answer she is to Him as she takes her place subjectively at His side, and our sister might learn from that too.

I just had these simple words that we might learn love from the Lord Jesus Himself, love individually, the One who has loved me, and each take it home to himself or herself, "loved me and given himself for me". It is the One who has "loved his own who were in the world", loved the brethren, "loved them to the end", loved them through everything; and then His love for the assembly, One who "has delivered himself up for it", in order that He might have an answer for His own heart. May He have the answer at the present time; an answer that will fill out throughout all eternity.

May these things encourage us for His Name's sake.

PREPARATION

Jim T Brown

Revelation 19: 7

Revelation 21: 2

The theme of preparation flows through the Holy Scriptures. Proverbs tells us that the heavens were prepared by Jehovah, chap 8: 27. What mighty operations entered into the preparation of the heavens, so majestic and magnificent:

When I see thy heavens, the work of thy fingers ...

What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man,
that thou visitest him?, Ps 8: 3, 4.

How marvellous to contemplate that! But, pre-eminently, there was a body prepared for the Lord Jesus. That would never cease to affect us. What divine activity entered into the preparation of that precious body; a body in which He would carry out the will of God in perfection; a body

in which He would suffer, in which He would die, and a body in which He would bear our sins. What an encouragement for our brother and sister that, at the outset of their marriage together, they have this common bond that the Lord Jesus bore their sins in His precious body on the tree. In going on high, too, He has prepared a place for us there, wonderful anticipation, and wonderful prospect.

These scriptures refer to the preparation of the assembly for the Lord Jesus; in the first, as the Lamb's wife, and in the second, "as a bride adorned for her husband". Chapter 19 says, "rejoice and exult, and give him glory; for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife has made herself ready". That is her own act. She has devoted herself to making herself ready. Down from Pentecost, the readying process has gone on, down through the centuries, through dark times and bright. Even in the dark ages there were assembly-minded persons, walking in fidelity and faithfulness as befitting what was due to the Lamb's wife, imbued with some impression of what the Lamb had suffered to secure the object of His affections. How would they know what He desired, what His longings were? Proverbs tells us, "The heart of her husband confideth in her" (chap 31: 11): they knew - and we should know - the beatings, speaking reverently, of that precious heart, His yearnings, His longings that there should be an answer to what His heart desires. How precious. It says, "And it was given to her that she should be clothed in fine linen, bright and pure; for the fine linen is the righteousnesses of the saints", Rev 19: 8. It may be just a little act of righteousness, or a bigger one perhaps, but each creating a thread to be woven into the garment of the wife. She has made herself ready. Think of it, century after century, threads produced each day, that will be woven into that garment for the delight of the heart of Christ. This work goes on unhindered. In recent months man's busy world has stuttered and paused, stalled in some cases, ceased in others, but the work of God has proceeded unhindered, every day adding something to the beauty of the clothing.

Our brother and sister have experienced delays to their marriage on account of current restrictions, but let them have the assurance that each day has not gone unnoticed in heaven. These days, worked out in patience, as accepting the will of God, and in submission to His ways, have doubtless produced a lustrous thread, which will be woven into that garment for the pleasure of the Lamb. What assurance that brings. It says, "the fine linen is the

righteousnesses of the saints”: more than one, and so there is a contribution for each of us to make. These things challenge us, but what an incentive it gives. How it galvanises our affections, and our spirits to walk in fidelity to the One who delivered Himself up for the assembly. He reserved nothing -

Reserving nothing save the right to love. Hymn 318

But there is a household setting as well; how much the household setting can provide. One thinks of John 12; it says there, “Jesus ... came to Bethany” and entered into the house of these three beloved souls. It continues, “There therefore they made him a supper”, v 1, 2. They were prepared. The Lord Jesus did not ask for a supper to be made for Him or for food to be provided. It was their instinctive reaction to the needs, the desires, the yearnings of the Lord Jesus. They had not to run out to buy the ingredients to make the supper. The ingredients were there in the house. How could they know what the Lord Jesus would desire, what His tastes were, what He would cherish and what He would value? Surely by communion with Him we would know what these yearnings are. The deeper our yearning for Him, the more prepared we are for what He Himself desires. It says in Proverbs of the woman of worth, “She is like the merchants' ships: she bringeth her food from afar”, chap 31: 14. Her links typically were with the heavenly Man, and the food she brought was from that heavenly region afar, where Christ in glory is. So that they knew in that household in Bethany what was suitable to Him, and what could be made available to Him according to His own desires. May this be so in our brother and sister's home.

Revelation 21 anticipates the eternal scene: “And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of the heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband”. It does not say exactly that she is the bride. She is not just nominally a bride; she is there in all the reality of what a bride should be. Every quality, every characteristic, every beauty desired of a bride is there for her adorning, and for His pleasure. What a vessel the assembly is: “the fulness of him who fills all in all” (Eph 1: 23), a creature vessel, yet capacitated to be the fulness of One so great and so glorious.

Then too He is “head over all things to the assembly” (v 22), and this glorious vessel is linked to Him in the headship. How wonderful also to consider what God will receive from the assembly: “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men”, Rev 22: 3. The assembly will have that

place. Think of this vessel providing a residence for God, and an environment for praise to God, “to him be glory in the assembly in Christ Jesus unto all generations of the age of ages”, Eph 3: 21. How grand these things are.

But this is the time of preparation. What a day of unmingled joy it will be when the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready; that is our responsibility. It is given to her to be clothed in fine linen, and divine sovereignty would no doubt enter into that; that is another side. But the preparatory side, the side of making ready, belongs to us now; it is our responsibility.

I commend it to our brother and sister. They together will be part of this great preparatory process, each day of their lives, as committed to divine interests here, producing a thread, to be woven into that clothing, which will be for the delight of Christ's heart and which will be part, by and by, of that adornment with which the assembly will be invested for His delight eternally. That scripture in Proverbs is so very wonderful: “She putteth her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle” (Prov 31: 19); the distaff is a feminine thought. It brings out an activity to which we can all contribute. It suggests spiritual energy and application to produce these glorious threads with which the assembly will be adorned. May we be encouraged to participate more fully, more effectively, more efficiently, in the preparatory process. We look forward to the day when the Lord Jesus will come to claim His assembly for Himself; the preparations will be finished then. Even now, “the Spirit and the bride say, Come”, Rev 22: 17.

May our hearts be enhanced in appreciation of this glorious vessel and the One who is her head. For His Name's sake.

MARRIAGE IN THE LORD

Richard M Brown

Genesis 24: 1-21

This chapter is much loved, I believe, by all those who cherish the precious light of the assembly which God has graciously given to us. It presents a lovely picture of the activities of the Holy Spirit as sent by the Father to secure a bride for His Son, and then to lead her back to

the heavenly Man. In these times in which we are, when we experience so much restriction and fewness, it is good to be exercised to keep the greatness of the assembly before us; because this chapter shows us that it is the primary matter that divine Persons are engaged with at the present time. The passage that our brother has already referred to in Ephesians 5 is one which bears out what we have often heard, that the assembly is the chief interest of Christ. But this chapter shows that, if we think of the Father and of the Holy Spirit, their primary occupation at the present time is with the assembly. That would help us to see how important the assembly is, and would cause us to appreciate in a greater way, dear brethren, the honour of being part of it.

In referring to this passage on this occasion I had in mind to speak briefly about marriage “in the Lord”, 1 Cor 7: 39. I would like to suggest that there are two matters that arise in connection with Rebecca - in type, of course - which must be present if a marriage is to be regarded in that light; if it is to be regarded as “in the Lord”. The first matter was the question of her family: she had to come from the right family. The second matter was the question of her willingness.

Abraham's primary concern was that the wife for his son should come from the right family. On no account was the servant to find a wife for Isaac from among the daughters of the Canaanites. It was essential that she be kindred to Abraham. What does that mean for us? It means that for a marriage to be in the Lord both the man and the woman must belong to the household of faith: they must both be believers. I am sure that is clear to us all. I am sure we can see that a marriage between a believer and an unbeliever could not be “in the Lord”. In writing to the Corinthians Paul says, “what part for a believer along with an unbeliever?”, 2 Cor 6: 15. So the first cardinal feature is that both the man and the woman are to be believers on the Lord Jesus. Thank God that our dear brother and sister are that.

But the servant raises quite a different matter. His concern was as to this matter of willingness. He says, “Perhaps the woman will not be willing to follow me to this land”. He could envisage a situation where he might find an eligible young woman from the right family, but she might not be willing to follow him. Now, I think that indicates that simply because two individuals are believers does not, of itself, make their marriage in the Lord. This additional feature is necessary. We might consider what it means practically for us.

You will notice that when the servant arrived outside the city he

turned to God in prayer, no doubt very much feeling his need of God's help in this all-important matter. In view of what Abraham had said to him, we might have thought he would have prayed that the first woman who came out of the city would be one of Abraham's kindred, but he says nothing about that at all. Instead, he proposes this simple test whereby, when he asks the woman to provide him with a sip of water, she would not only give him one, but she would also provide water for his camels. What was that test designed to bring out? What was it that the servant was looking for? It brought out Rebecca's alacrity; it brought out her readiness to serve. But lying behind this simple test was a key principle: it brought out that Rebecca was prepared to put the interests of the servant before her own. She was prepared to subordinate her own interests to the interests of the servant. That, in its application to ourselves, is what makes a marriage in the Lord. It is the marriage of two individuals who recognise the Lord's authority over them, who recognise the Lord's rights over them and who desire to answer to those rights in a practical way, and who recognise that the path of blessing for them is to put the Lord's interests before their own. That is the critical feature that makes a marriage in the Lord, and it is what Rebecca demonstrated by this simple test. She had her own business to attend to - she had come out of the city to draw water - but for the moment all that was put to one side while she attended to the servant and provided water for his camels also. That feature is the secret to a marriage in which we may prove the Lord's support and blessing.

Now, Rebecca never knew she was being tested. Providing water was a very simple matter. Rebecca did not realise, I suppose, that at this moment she was being observed. I would like to suggest that we are all under test. And it is in the simple matters of everyday life that it is manifest whether or not the Lord has the place with us that He ought to have. As I say, Rebecca never knew that she was being observed, but we all are, dear brethren. The Lord has His eye upon us all, and the Holy Spirit has too; we are all under observation. The Holy Spirit has come here to maintain the interests of Christ. I believe the Holy Spirit is looking for persons, and looking for households too, that He can use in His great concern to maintain the interests of Christ here on the earth at the present time.

Rebecca never knew she was under test, nor could she have known what blessing would flow to her from answering to the test. How

could she have had any idea at this point what blessing she would come into? As we seek to put the Lord's interests first, as we seek to be committed to the present movements of the Holy Spirit here on the earth, the Lord is able to bring in blessing in a way that we may never have expected. It does not mean, of course, that the pathway is without difficulties and exercises; it surely is not. But it is a pathway in which we may prove the Lord's gracious support. That is something for us to commit ourselves to. Each one of us can be exercised to be personally committed to the Lord Jesus; but it is a very blessed thing to have a companion with you in that path. I commend that to our brother and sister especially; to be together, to be with one another, in relation to the Lord and His interests. Having a house of your own opens up new opportunities in which to do that: to provide for the Lord, to be committed to His interests, and to care for His beloved people. There is nothing more precious to the Lord on the earth at the present time than His dear people. To have a household is an opportunity to care for them, and so prove His gracious blessing and support.

At the end of the chapter they say to Rebecca, "mayest thou become thousands of tens of thousands; and may thy seed possess the gate of their enemies!", v 60. May we suggest, in its application to ourselves, that becoming thousands of ten thousands would speak of spiritual enlargement; so that as moving on this line we grow in our souls, grow in our knowledge of Christ, grow in our knowledge of His love, as our brother has spoken of it, and grow in our appreciation of what His chief interest is here on earth. "And may thy seed possess the gate of their enemies!" might suggest that a household thus set up is one that is maintained in moral victory. Over against all the influences that are abroad, and the terrible breakdown that has come into marriage in our society, a marriage of two souls who are together in relation to the Lord is impregnable. It will overcome through thick and thin.

I commend these two features which are essential to a marriage in the Lord. May our dear brother and sister prove the Lord's support in committing themselves wholeheartedly to them, as indeed may we all, for His glory.

Maidstone

18 September 2020

At a marriage meeting

THE SUFFERINGS OF JESUS

Mark I Webster

Philippians 2: 5-8

Hebrews 12: 2-3

Mark 7: 31-35

Matthew 26: 36-46; 27: 45-46

I desire to say something about the sufferings of Jesus. I hesitate to do so because it is a very deep and holy matter about which to speak. However, I have read these passages because I thought that it is important, in view of our affections being stimulated, to seek to speak at any rate of some aspects of the sufferings of Jesus. We often speak of His sufferings at the hand of God on the cross, and that is a very solemn yet precious matter, because it was at the cross that the sins of believers were borne and the matter of sin itself was resolved to God's eternal satisfaction. His sufferings there are consequently peculiarly precious, no doubt, to everyone who believes on Him. But He suffered both on the cross and in His life here amongst men, and these sufferings were extensive and include what He suffered in both His spirit and His body.

I read in Philippians, not to speak in detail from it, but just, as it were, to establish the background of what I desire to address. And this scripture is important in doing so, because the sufferings of Jesus relate to Him as Man; we could not speak of God suffering, that would be wrong, but we can speak of the sufferings of Jesus as Man. Yet this scripture reminds us that the One who suffered as Man was, and remains in His Person, no less than God. It brings out the wonder of the fact that prior to emptying Himself He subsisted in the form of God. Who can comprehend that? None of us can, however intelligent we may be, because we are all creatures, and consequently we are limited in what we can understand. But we can go by the words of Scripture, that the One we speak of freely and affectionately as Jesus, subsisted prior to His incoming here in the form of God. He did not subsist as Man prior to His incoming as a lowly Babe laid in Bethlehem's manger. He was, is, and ever remains God in His Person. God is a spirit: omnipotent, unseen, beyond the ability of man to comprehend, however intelligent he may be. Men may seek to probe but they find there is that which is impenetrable to their natural minds, the divinity and glory of God Himself. That is who Jesus is; and that is who He has ever been. And He subsisted in that form, but He came into Manhood.

The hymn writer puts it so well:

God manifest in flesh, O wonder of His universe! (Hymn 400)

Consider the wonder of it that the One who was the Creator, by whom God made the worlds (Heb 1: 2), came into that very creation Himself. And He came into conditions of flesh and blood like you and me. He took “his place in the likeness of men”; as another also wrote: “that ... which we have seen with our eyes; that which we contemplated, and our hands handled ...”, 1 John 1: 1. The Lord Jesus was and remains a real Man, and yet He was and remains God. Note how carefully the writer seeks to bring out the reality of His Manhood whilst ensuring that the glory of His Person stays guarded. And He came in, emptying Himself, in order to accomplish what was in the heart of God. Think of that! And the wonder of divine thoughts is that they involve mankind - men, women and young persons of like passions to ourselves. Have you ever considered the blessed matter that you were in God's heart, and such was the greatness of His thoughts for you, that a divine Person came into Manhood to suffer and die in order that you might be secured for His pleasure, for His glory? We would never have known what was in the heart of God and His love, and know *Him*, were it not that He has drawn near to us in the One who came into Manhood, Jesus. And He came in order that we might know the heart of God, and that all that stood out against us on account of our sins and our sinful state, should be resolved totally. That involved immense sufferings for Him, our Lord Jesus. It involved that He should take a “bondman's form” and take up in full obedience the will of His Father, whatever the cost in sufferings to Himself. He entered into that relationship in which He was subject to His Father.

Now the writer here in Philippians does not develop the matter of His sufferings in detail, but what he does write is that Jesus became “obedient even unto death, and that the death of the cross”. He was not obedient to death; Jesus was not subject to death for He was sinless - “in him sin is not” (1 John 3: 5) - but His obedience *took* Him to death, and that the death of the cross. The writer, as it were, hints at what that obedience involved for Jesus, but does not develop the matter of His sufferings further. But other scriptures, including those I have read, do help us to understand something of the extent of those holy sufferings of His, and thereby to become deeply affected in our souls in the consideration of them.

In the passage that I read in Hebrews, the writer was

addressing those who were suffering. They were in danger of becoming weary, fainting in their minds on account of the opposition that as Jewish converts they were facing. He writes to them about the suffering One that they might be encouraged in their souls. He brings out that Jesus as Man here was marked by faith. Jesus set the matter on (see footnote, Acts 3: 15), and the writer was encouraging these dear believers that they too might be marked by faith in a pathway which they were finding to be testing and which involved suffering. And in so doing, he brought before them the matter of the sufferings of Jesus in His pathway here. He writes of the joy that was lying before Him, and how good it is to be reminded that His sufferings are now over and He has entered into His joy. We could not attribute the matter of sorrow or sufferings to Jesus now. That is not to say that He does not enter into the sufferings and sorrows of His own for He does; He is able to sympathise. As this epistle brings out, He has experienced everything that His beloved people experience in a world that is hostile to them. He is able to sympathise with our infirmities as an earlier passage in the epistle records, as One who was: “tempted in all things in like manner, sin apart”, chap 4: 15. How wonderful that is, that we have One who is sympathetic. He is now above, in glory, and He is marked by joy, the joy that was lying before Him. He is no longer in death; He is no longer in a suffering pathway. The same blessed Man is now in glory. I trust that everyone here knows Him for themselves as their Saviour who is now in glory.

Now the writer refers in this passage to what Jesus endured: He endured the cross. My impression is that in the context of this scripture what the writer had particularly in his mind was that which Jesus experienced at the hands of men in relation to the cross. He endured it and He “despised the shame”. The writer seems to be bringing out the public setting of the cross, and the shame of it. We sometimes sing:

Man the cross to Him awarded,
Man the Saviour crucified; (Hymn 404)

How true that is true. They awarded Him a cross of greatest shame. Consider that. The Romans reserved death on a cross for the worst of criminals, not solely to enhance the physical suffering but by making it public to demonstrate the shame, and no doubt to act as a deterrent to others. And that is where men put Jesus. He endured it; He despised the shame. The two robbers crucified with Jesus should have felt the shame, for unlike Jesus they were guilty sinners who deserved to be

punished for their crimes, as one of them recognised: “we indeed justly...”, Luke 23: 41. The shame was theirs. The shame of the cross had no personal application to Jesus for He was holy; but as going to the cross He despised it. He was put there by man, you might say, as a common criminal, and yet He was One who had done no evil. The robber crucified with Him added to what he had already said: “... but this man has done nothing amiss”, and a true lover of Him could write “... who did no sin”, 1 Pet 2: 22. It was impossible for Him to do so. The Pharisees, with all their knowledge of the law and their intelligence, could bring nothing to justly bear upon Him. They tried and failed, and ended up falsely accusing Him. Their accusations bore no substance; they could not stand up in a court of law. And they did not before Pilate; he had to say, “I find in him no fault whatever”, John 19: 4. What a remarkable thing that was that he said. In a court of law in this country, people are found either guilty or not guilty of the crime of which they are accused. If they are found not guilty it means no more than that there was no evidence, or insufficient evidence, to find them guilty. But in what he said, Pilate had to recognise that with Jesus there was no source of evil whatsoever; it was impossible for Him to sin. The terms guilty and not guilty never applied to Jesus, for He was sinless; rather He was “holy, harmless, undefiled, separated from sinners” (Heb 7: 26), the “holy one of God”, John 6: 69. And yet, despite that, men awarded Him the cross. What holy sufferings were His as the One who endured the cross and despised the shame. To us is given to “consider well him who endured so great contradiction from sinners”.

Every kind of sinful man was opposed to the Lord Jesus. The religious persons of whom I have spoken were opposed to Him, but without a cause. Jesus could say that, “They hated me without a cause”, John 15: 25. There was no just reason for their hatred, but what brought it out was that the Lord Jesus, in all that He was, and in all that He said, exposed what they were. They were sinners like you and me. And He endured contradiction from them. They were hypocritical, of course; they said one thing and they did another. The Lord Jesus exposed all that. In His very presence, in all that He was and all that He said, He exposed the true character of all that they were. And we find that too, do we not? As we get into the presence of Jesus, all that we are and what we have done becomes exposed to Him. We may not be exposed to others, but we are to Him. As believers on Him, we have found that He does not condemn us; but for these unbelieving persons who opposed Him the exposure brought out the flesh in them; it brought

out the sinful character of man, that which is in every kind of man. Consider that; the religious men of the day, the Roman soldiers, all who opposed Him; their opposition caused the sufferings that our blessed Saviour, the righteous One, endured from them.

As to the Roman soldiers, they took Him, they mocked Him, they spat upon Him, they put a crown of thorns upon His head, they gave Him blows on the head. Does that not affect you, dear fellow believer, that your Saviour was treated like that? Callous, unnamed men, sinners like you and me, treated the sinless One, the Lord of glory, my precious Saviour and yours if you believe on Him, in such a way. He was the One “who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth; who, when reviled, reviled not again;” 1 Pet 2: 22-23. He bore the suffering meekly. If you and I suffer, particularly if unjustly, then there is a strong tendency for it to bring out the flesh in us, but there was no such flesh to be brought out in Jesus. The very sufferings that He endured from men brought out the holy character of that perfect Man. They also brought out the love of God in forgiveness to men. Jesus said, as men did their worst to Him, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do”, Luke 23: 34. We sometimes say, and how true it is, that God hates sin but He loves the sinner. Well, that was fully expressed in Jesus when He was here. Those persons who treated Him in that despicable way, did He rebuke them? No, He demonstrated the kindness and love of God to all. It is a wonderful matter. The very hatred and mockery and callousness of men caused Him to suffer, but He bore it all in His spirit, and in His body too. The sufferings affected Him in His spirit, yet they brought nothing out in retaliation. What a blessed Man! The very sufferings themselves served to bring out the holy perfection of His manhood.

I read the passage in Mark because it serves to illustrate for us how the Lord Jesus felt things in His spirit, His suffering in spirit, as He came into contact with persons affected by the ravages of sin. The passage records: “they bring to him a deaf man who could not speak right”. What does that mean? I think it simply means that he was a sinner. Well, you might say, he had a physical deformity. But the passage reads that “he could not speak **right**”. That is interesting, is it not, that the writer has seen fit to put it that way, that he “could not speak right”? And that is what leads me to say that he was a sinner. That is the case, is it not, with sinners; we find that in our sins we cannot “speak right”? The Lord Jesus dealt with the problem. How wonderful that is,

that in His grace He dealt with the problem in this poor man, as He is resolving the problems of sinners in His grace today, all in view of them being healed and secured, as this man was. "The band of his tongue was loosed and he spoke right". What a change! There was no gradual recovery. Mark does not record what is gradual; that the man slowly began to talk correctly - oh no! One moment he could not speak right, the next it says that he spoke right. How wonderful that is. That is the effect of having to do with Jesus in faith, is it not? The little company of believers here this afternoon is part of an immense company who can testify that as coming to Jesus in our need, as having to do with Him in faith, He resolves the problem of our sinnership for us immediately.

But this passage also records as to Jesus that "he groaned"; that is remarkable as to the Lord Jesus. I think it brings out, if you follow the note through, that the depths of His feelings were expressed in that. He felt in His spirit the effects of sin upon man. He felt it as only He, the righteous, sinless One, could. It entered into the sufferings that He endured in His spirit; those that He endured as He had to deal with persons here, suffering persons, suffering in their sins, and as He saw the devastation that sin had caused amongst men. He had to deal with every age group, as we know; the gospels record that. Persons in need, persons just like you and I were in our sins. What it must have felt to Jesus. How He must have suffered in His spirit as in His grace He dealt with the needs of men. It says He groaned. In another passage, in relation to the death of Lazarus, the scripture records that He wept, John 11: 35. I think that the weeping of Jesus brought out the depth of His feelings and sufferings as He saw the consequences of what sin had brought in, the terrible state of man, and man's inability to deliver himself from it and the consequences of it. For the wages of sin is death; the evidence of it was there before all. It says, "Jesus wept". Here in Mark it records, "he groaned". Well, I feel I cannot say more about it, it is an intensely holy matter.

And then there are other aspects of His suffering in His spirit. Consider how He must have felt the rejection by His earthly people, those whose cry as expressed in prophecy through David was, "When will he die, and his name perish?", Psalm 41: 5. Consider too how He must have felt the betrayal by Judas, the one who delivered Him up. Again, the prophetic writer brought out His feelings, "Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I confided, who did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me", Ps 41: 9. What that must have meant to Him. A

brother drew our attention in a preaching here many years ago to what the writer records, in John 8: 57, that the Jews said of Jesus, when He was probably only just above thirty years old, that He had “not yet fifty years”. It perhaps brings out for us how the effect of all that He bore suffering in His spirit was seen in His visage, as One here in flesh and blood conditions just like you and I, sin apart; “... his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the children of men”, Isa 52: 14.

Now in Matthew 26 He “began to be sorrowful and deeply depressed”. With us, and I can only speak from experience, depression is often the result when something goes against our fleshly will. But that could not be the case with Jesus, He who had laid aside the right to exercise His own perfect will as taking up and fulfilling the will of another, His God and Father. Rather, I think it brings out the depths of His feelings. He began to be sorrowful and deeply depressed; think of that. The One who had been here amongst men bearing their griefs and carrying their sorrows (Isa 53: 4), was at this point Himself sorrowful and deeply depressed. What a contrast to what He had experienced in the joy of communion with his Father in His pathway here. What a life of joy that would have been. But now the enemy, Satan, the one who had “departed from him for a time” (Luke 4: 13), the one who held the power of death (Heb 2: 14), returned and brought to bear upon the soul of Jesus the awfulness, the terror of death itself. What that must have meant to Him, that He, the One upon whom death had no claim, would, in obedience to God’s will, go into death itself. What sufferings Jesus must have experienced in the anticipation of it here in Gethsemane, as Satan did his worst to bring the horror of death to bear upon Him. No doubt the enormity of what it meant to our Lord Jesus is, as it were, emphasised for us in that, on three occasions recorded in this gospel He speaks to His Father, in the first saying, “if it be possible let this cup pass from me”. “If it be possible”; the Lord Jesus would have fully known and understood that it was not possible; but His holy suffering feelings were entering into the matter. But then He says, “Sleep on now and take your rest; behold, the hour has drawn nigh, and the Son of Man is delivered up into the hands of sinners”, Matt 26: 45. He overcame Satan, and delivered Himself up to those who came to seize Him in full obedience to the will of His God and Father. He was bound in love and obedience to that will; He could not be separated from it, whatever the pressure, cost and sufferings for Himself. He was truly “... obedient even unto death ...”. The scripture

records here that His sweat became as great drops of blood. Now when we come under pressure we sometimes sweat, to be very simple about it. You see someone under pressure - perhaps they may not be physically exerting themselves, but they are sweating - it means they are under pressure, unless they are ill. With Jesus, the pressure was so great, it says, "his sweat became as great drops of blood", Luke 22: 44. Think of the intensity of the feelings of Jesus, that it should be so. What sufferings were His! And yet those sufferings here in the intensity of such pressure, and faced with every effort of Satan to divert and overcome Him, only brought out His obedience in love, never turning aside, not for one moment. Oh, what a One you and I have, dear fellow believer, as our Saviour and Lord.

Now in chapter 27, the words of the Lord Jesus, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?", at the end of the three hours of darkness show to us the intensity of what He suffered and endured as forsaken of God when He became the Sin-bearer. The Lord Jesus was on the cross longer than three hours, but these were three hours on which everything rested if the thoughts in love of God were to be realised, if men were to be saved, brought into blessing and secured for His pleasure and service eternally. They involved His suffering at the hand of God. In the earlier period on the cross before He died, the Lord Jesus suffered from men; He endured their reviling, the shaking of their heads, their mocking tones as they uttered, amongst others, those words, "He saved others; himself he cannot save"; Mark 15: 29-31. How He must have felt it all. But then in the three hours of darkness He suffered at the hand of God. God clothed the land in darkness. None could see what transpired there. None could penetrate that darkness, when that blessed Man, that holy precious One, was made sin. He was made that which He was not, in order that He might bear God's judgment. He bore the judgment in relation to sin in the three hours of darkness; that is an important thing to understand. He bore it and He exhausted it. The Lord Jesus bore the sins too, of all who trust in Him. He took our sins upon Himself as if they were His own and bore them in His body there upon the tree. He faced God as to them; He faced the judgment of God in relation to them. Think of that, our sins! Mine, and yours dear hearer, if you believe in Him and His precious shed blood. He alone was able for it. What it must have meant to Him. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?". That was not a question to which the Lord Jesus did not know the answer. It was the cry of One who had been forsaken. What a matter that was. It would have been impossible

for Him to have been forsaken unless He had become the Sin-bearer. That necessitated the forsaking of God, for God is holy. And God poured His wrath upon Him there. That sweet communion with His Father, that which had sustained Him and given Him joy at every moment of His life, was suspended during those three hours when He, as Man, was forsaken by God. There was nothing; He was truly alone, the Lord Jesus. There was none to comfort Him, none to support Him. What that must have meant to Him. It was a feeling matter: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?". And He then, His sufferings over, He committed His spirit into the hands of His Father and went into death, and shed His precious blood.

Well the sufferings of Jesus are a precious matter to consider; they bring out for us His holy perfection and feelings as Man and the depth and fulness of His unchanging love; love for His God and Father, whose will He fulfilled whatever the suffering that this involved for Him, and His love for you and me. May we grow in our appreciation of Him. His sufferings are over; He is out of death; the Victor over it, risen in triumph and ascended. He is now in glory. Our part and place, if we are believers on Him, is with Him there. That is a wonderful thing - we can enter into His joy and have part with Him there, as we will eternally. No tear-filled eye there; no suffering will be known in that scene. We feel the sorrows, the pressures and sufferings that He allows us to pass through but they are all for our gain; yet none can compare with the enormity of that which He experienced here in holy perfection.

May our affections be nurtured as we consider Him and His sufferings, for His Name's sake.

Buckhurst Hill

27 September 2020

“CONFORMED TO THE IMAGE OF HIS SON”

Alistair M Brown

Romans 3: 21-26; 6: 10-11; 8: 28-30

The text for the day on our calendar this morning was Romans 8: 28, and as I read the passage further I was struck by this, that God's desire for those who love Him is that they should be “conformed to the image of his Son, so that He should be the firstborn among many brethren”.

God's desire is that Christ should be glorified, and that He should have the pre-eminent place. That is conveyed in the expression that Christ should be “the firstborn among many brethren.” It is remarkable that the Holy Spirit brings this thought into the foundational epistle to the Romans. It is a fundamentally important epistle: if we are not, in our measure, formed by the moral exercises that the apostle writes about in Romans, then we will be like a ship without a keel and without any ballast. We will be unstable.

The truths in Romans bring stability to believers. We learn what we are according to nature - which is worthless and sinful, as we read in chapter 3. We discover in chapter 7 that “in me, that is, in my flesh, good does not dwell”. These are fundamental matters, to be received in the depth of our souls as believers. It is vital to be grounded in the truth of Romans. But the truth of Romans also includes this - that God intends that those who come to trust in Christ also come to love God, and will be conformed to the image of His Son.

We can say therefore that God's objective in causing the gospel to be preached is that people might come to know Him, and might be conformed to the image of His Son. You may think that is going beyond the gospel. But this great objective could not be gained if it were not for the gospel. God would not reach His end of Christ being “the firstborn among many brethren”, having the place of pre-eminence among those that love God and are the subject of divine grace, were it not for the gospel being preached and received. The gospel takes up man as he is - God does not overlook what man is. “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God”. God does not overlook that, but He has the answer to it. The answer is in a Man, the same Man who so delights God that He wants a whole company of people conformed to His image. That is what God has in mind.

The object of the gospel is the salvation of sinners; certainly it is.

But God goes further than that: He desires to have a company secured like Christ. We can see from this passage in Romans 8 that the full result that God has in mind is that people should be secured who are like Christ. That is what being conformed to His image means: people who are like Jesus. And that is with a view to marking out Christ in His pre-eminence as “the firstborn among many brethren”. God is so pleased with Christ that He wants a whole universe populated with people like Him, and He will have that. In the gospel, God presents that One as Saviour. We come into God's thoughts of favour and blessing because the gospel is preached to us: what abundance of grace!

There is a lot said about infection, and how it strikes one after another, spreading through the population and incapacitating people. It makes us think of the way that sin has infected mankind, and brought in distance and distrust between men and God. We are told at the beginning of Genesis that God came down into the garden to commune with man. I do not know how long that went on, but I think the period was very short before sin came in to spoil things. God desired to commune with His creature, made in His own image, a distinctive part of His creation with intelligence and affection and a capacity to understand God and to respond to Him. Man is a creature, but he is a distinctive part of creation and God desired to commune with him. Then sin came in and it brought distrust. Satan brought about a breakdown of trust on man's part towards God. He injected into Eve's mind thoughts about God that were not true, and she gave room to them and began to doubt and to mistrust God: 'Had God really said this? Is that what God really meant?'. The enemy was speaking as though he knew better than God did. And Eve fell into that trap, and Adam also.

That is the state in which sin leaves man: helpless and sad, and exiled from the grace of God and the blessings of God. How much sorrow there is in the world today as a result of sin. We see only the tip of the iceberg in the newspapers, and sometimes what we come into contact with. But what sorrow and moral dislocation and grief has been wrought in people's relationships with each other, starting from the dislocation of relationships between people and God. God takes account of all of that and He does not overlook it, but He has the answer to it. His answer is not in philosophy or politics or man's self-improvement. His answer is in Jesus, God's blessed Man.

In chapter 3, it says that “righteousness of God is manifested ... righteousness of God by faith of Jesus Christ towards all, and upon all

those who believe: for there is no difference; for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God". What a coming short there has been. God made man upright, in His own image: "Let us make man in our image", Gen 1: 26. Man was the special part of creation - the top stone - but all have sinned. That includes you and me: we all come short of the glory of God. What we do not have, but need, is righteousness. By sinning we come short of God's standard, and we cannot stand in the presence of God, whose eyes are too holy to behold evil, Hab 1: 13. But God has not been thwarted in His desire to have people like Christ in His presence. We have spoken of Christ being God's answer. God brings in righteousness in Christ. And then, by faith in that blessed One, righteousness is available: "righteousness of God by faith of Jesus Christ towards all" - God has in mind blessing for everyone. Then it adds, "and upon all those who believe".

The gospel is preached so that we might believe what God says about Christ. The enemy of our souls works, as he worked at the beginning in Eden, so that Adam and Eve should not believe what God said. That was the whole point of what the enemy put before Eve, that she might not believe, and he is still at it today. He will distract people and try to turn their attention away from the message of the gospel, saying it is a fable, and not to be believed. What audacity on the part of the enemy of our souls to stand against what God is saying in the gospel and to put in our hearts the thought that we should not believe God! It is a terrible thing. I trust that everyone here has believed. If so, the righteousness of God is upon you. How wonderful to believe what God says about Christ in the gospel, and thus to know God's righteousness upon us. What we needed most and what we did not have, and could never provide for ourselves as sinners, God has provided in Christ. And it is ours through believing in Him.

Though the scripture says that all men have sinned, there was one Man "who did no sin" (1 Pet 2: 22), "who knew not sin" (2 Cor 5: 21), and in whom "sin is not", 1 John 3: 5. These three things are said about Jesus - one Man in the whole history of the race who was different. He was sin apart, as a lamb without spot and without blemish, foreknown indeed before the foundation of the world, 1 Pet 1: 19. God brought His man in - Jesus! A different kind of man entirely, the lowly Son of the carpenter in the world's eyes, but now set forth by God a mercy-seat. How is God able to set Him forth a mercy-seat? Because He was obedient unto death. The sinless One offered Himself spotless to God. What a basis on which God can bless, a basis on which He can attribute

righteousness to those that believe on Him! God gave His best, Christ the One whom He loved and loves above all - He gave that One, gave Him for sinners like you and me. And Jesus in complete obedience to the will of His God and Father was obedient even unto death, and that the death of the cross. That righteous One gave Himself as a ransom for sinners, so that you and I and everyone who believes may come under the shelter of His precious blood, and be regarded by God as righteous - "righteousness of God upon all those who believe".

God has not left us hopeless. He has come in in Christ to justify us freely by His grace - "through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God has set forth a mercy-seat". What a wonderful expression! It is not that God has hidden the matter away, or made it difficult to come to salvation: God sets Christ forth. The mercy-seat was where God met and spoke with His people. He did it through Moses originally, but God's thought was to be able to meet and speak with His people at the mercy-seat. God has now brought in Christ as the mercy-seat, the One in whom He is able to meet us and speak to us. How God loves to set forth Christ as a mercy-seat. He loves to bring Christ to the attention of people in that way. The way of salvation is in Christ, through faith in that blessed One and in His blood. We are "justified freely by his grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus". It is Jesus that has done the great work to manifest God's righteousness, and has given His life, paid the price that God required, and His blood has been shed, so that we might be justified. God is righteously able to justify us freely by His grace. Justified means being made righteous, and God is able to justify us because of what Christ has done. If God makes you righteous, no one can question that. God's attribution of righteousness as a result of faith in the blood of His blessed Son is what matters for time and eternity.

How wonderful that, by taking God at His word and believing in His Man, we are made righteous in God's sight. We are counted righteous by God.

The sinner who believes is free,
Can say, The Saviour died for me;
Can point to the atoning blood
And say, This made my peace with God. (Hymn 357).

This is how God looks upon you as a believer in Jesus. He sees the blood and He sees complete righteousness there; He attributes that righteousness to you, friend, as a believer in Christ and His blood. All

we have to do is take God at His word. Simply believe - the work has been done, by the One who has so delighted God. Another hymn says -

God is satisfied with Jesus,
We are satisfied as well, (Hymn 410).

How full, eternal and assured our salvation is. The guilt of our sins blotted out, our unrighteousness atoned for, covered, in the death and blood-shedding of Jesus, God's righteousness upheld, so that He is able to forgive in righteousness. The hymn says that -

But in the cross of Christ we see
How God can save, yet righteous be. (Hymn 357).

He maintains His righteousness while pouring in His grace, because of the work of Christ. How delighted God is with that blessed One.

How essential, then, to come in faith and repentance to Christ. How deep a matter it is to see that my sins have been covered by His blood. What a matter that my sins were laid upon Him, that He confessed the sins of His people as His own, as another has said (JND Collected Writings vol 29 p287), and suffered for me - suffered judgment that I could never bear. That is a deep matter for the believer to go into; it involves repentance. As a repenting sinner, I take sides with God in relation to what I am as a sinner. I freely acknowledge that I am a sinner, and that the burden of my sins was laid upon Christ and not upon me. The Saviour has taken my sins upon Himself, God has placed them there, and they are regarded as His so that He should bear the penalty and the burden and the guilt that were mine - and take them away. That should freshly affect us. Those who have come this way are *repenting* sinners: that is, we are always to be marked by the spirit of repentance and of thankfulness to Christ and to God.

And yet, wonderful as this deliverance from guilt and judgment is, God (we speak reverently) does not stop there. There is joy in heaven when a sinner repents, but God does not stop there: He has more in mind. The scripture we read in Romans 6: 10,11 refers to Christ having died to sin once for all, and now living to God. And then the apostle says, "So also ye, reckon yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." The apostle is speaking about sin - the principle of disobedience, and to be free from its power we have to reckon ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. How can that be? Mr Coates said that reckoning comes by love (CAC The Food of

Life vol 17 p146) - love for Christ, for the One who died for me. It is not difficult to love Christ because He has given His life for us. Every believer in Jesus loves Him. But love is to have a result in us. If our love for Christ is sincere and deep, we are going to put Him first, and we are going to judge what we find in ourselves that is not consistent with Him and would dishonour Him. Loving the One who is righteous leads me to a deeper judgment of the unrighteousness that I find in me. The great point Paul is making is that the believer has resources available to enable us to align ourselves with Christ and to derive our life from Him. Our motivation, priorities and walk are derived from Christ. A believer who understands this puts Christ first and loves Christ deeply.

We are challenged as to the depth of our love for the Lord Jesus, and whether we love Him so much that we are prepared to take account of ourselves as being in the same relation to things as He is, CAC The Food of Life vol 17 p146. If He is rejected in this world, we stand rejected too. We will not find our pleasure or place in a world that has rejected Christ. We cannot be a friend of the world and a friend of Christ. We cannot be a lover of things that are in the world and a lover of Christ. If we give Christ the first place, we are sowing to Him and we are sowing to the Spirit, Gal 6: 8. What the apostle brings out in Romans is that the gift and power of the Spirit is essential if the believer is going to live for Christ here, as the verse that we have read says - "alive to God in Christ Jesus". We cannot do that in our own power. We might try in zeal to live for Christ here, but God has provided resource in the Holy Spirit so that the believer who loves Christ and is obedient to Him, who owns Him as Lord and desires to have the gift of the Spirit, is able to live thus. The matter of obedience is vital in that - the Holy Spirit comes upon those who obey Christ. If we are characteristically obedient, and desire to have the Spirit's help, He comes in to help us. The Spirit helps us in every right desire, and He helps to keep Christ before us. The gift of the Holy Spirit is immense. How wonderful that the Spirit of Christ should be available to us. And as we sow to Him and grow in our affection for Christ, He gives us power to live - to be "alive to God in Christ Jesus".

Every day we are to prove the Spirit's power and to call upon Him. The Spirit is to be drawn upon as the power for us to live to God in Christ Jesus, and to resist the efforts of the enemy. "Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world", 1 John 4: 4. Not only is He powerful for us in the struggle against the flesh, but the Spirit is the power for bringing Christ before us, so that we can rejoice in

communion with that blessed One in the power of the Spirit. Christ is our great High Priest, and the Holy Spirit is our Friend here who joins Himself to us. What power is towards us as believers both in heaven and here with us on the earth.

In Romans 8, the word is, “we *do* know that all things work together for good to those who love God”. Everyone who has accepted Christ as Saviour has become a lover of God. Have we become lovers of God, knowing that all things work together for good to us? Do we accept that what God allows and brings in is for our blessing? If we do, we prove Christ as our High Priest. We increase in our knowledge of the One who intercedes for us and who strengthens us. The deeper the sorrows and the exercises, the more we come to know Him. It is easy to speak about it, but how vital to have the experience. I am sure that each of us knows something of it. Some are passing through deep waters, but we can be assured that all things work together for good to those who love God.

And then the apostle adds, “who have been called according to purpose”. We do not preach God's purpose, exactly; but those who have trusted in Jesus and have become lovers of God know that they have been called according to purpose. It has often been said that above that narrow gate whereby we enter into blessing, we see the words, 'Whosoever will' - that is, God has everyone in mind for blessing. But once we have entered in, we look back and see written above the door on the inside the words, 'Foreknown in Christ before the foundation of the world'. Both are true. God has called us according to purpose, in that One who is our Saviour, because God has no other in mind. His purpose is that we should be conformed to the image of that One. This is the One to whose image we are to be conformed.

God has in mind to bring us through to conformity to Him for our blessing. It is a wonderful matter to be like Christ and to know something of the company of many brethren who are conformed to Him. It leads us on to appreciate something of the blessedness of Christ as the Firstborn - the One who is pre-eminent in a company of those that love Him and who are like Him. These are tremendous blessings for us. Yet there is more to it than our blessing, for this is all to God's glory. The result of all God's great thoughts and His purpose, the result of the giving of His Son, is that He should be glorified. And He is. The scripture speaks of the saints being to the praise of the glory of God's grace, Eph 1: 6. It is wonderful to be for the praise of God's glory,

to hold forth the excellence and the glory of God's grace in the circle of the saints, and also in this contrary scene in the world.

That is what God is achieving in believers. God's achievements are tremendous. All this has been made possible and is secured in His Man, in Christ. Our entering in is through Christ, and we enter in by believing in Him; into the most wonderful blessings that God has in mind. It is all with a view that God should have a company that is to the praise of the glory of His grace. He has such a company. I am not referring just to the circle of fellowship, but He has a company in believers with the Spirit who are to the praise of the glory of His grace: what blessing to appreciate God's thoughts and contribute to them. God will be glorified eternally in the innumerable hosts of those whom Christ has secured for the glory of God. Wonderful sovereign mercy, and riches of grace, that we have been brought within the range of God's thoughts in purpose.

I trust that we might be strengthened and fortified in our faith in Christ and in our love for Him, and in our experience of Him by the Spirit, so that we are here to the glory of God's grace, and for our own blessing.

For His Name's sake.

Kirkcaldy

20 September 2020

WITH CHRIST

Paul Martin

1 Thessalonians 4: 15-17

Psalms 23

John 21: 20-22

These passages have come to me, beloved, as thinking of what it is to be with Christ, and also what it is to prove Him with us. Our sister is now with Christ: what we have before us here is her body which will be buried today, but she is not here, she is with Christ. Could there be anything better? Paul said he desired to be “with Christ, for it is very much better”, Phil 1: 23. He did not say better than what. It is better than everything; “being with Christ, for it is very much better”.

You will remember that on the cross the Lord Jesus spoke to the thief and He said, “To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise”, Luke 23: 43. I do not want to be fanciful, but the Lord Jesus has said that to our beloved sister; He said it just over a week ago: “To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise”. He selected her, His work was complete, and He said, “To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise”. Paradise must be very wonderful - the apostle Paul said he was caught up into paradise, 2 Cor 12: 4. It may have been when he was stoned in Acts 14, when they “drew him out of the city, supposing him to have died” (v 19), but he said to the Corinthians that he “was caught up into paradise”, and he gives us some inkling of what it is like. He said that he heard things said that could not be uttered in this lower world. That is what our sister is enjoying now; she is enjoying communications from our blessed Lord who died for her, and who lives, and she is now with Him.

Paul says here to the Thessalonians that we are not to be anxious about those who have fallen asleep. Our sister is only asleep as to what is here. Her duties as a wife, a mother and a grandmother, as well as in business, and her part in the local meeting, all those responsibilities are now complete and she is asleep as to those. Is that not wonderful - just to be in His presence, receiving His own communications? Paul says that we are not to be anxious as to those fallen asleep, but to look on to the moment when the Lord Himself will come, the One who has broken the power of death. He broke it when He went into it. How great that movement was. It was His own movement. He gave up His spirit, He went into death, and death had to flee. “What ailed thee, thou sea, that thou fleddest? thou Jordan, that

thou turnedst back?”, Psalm 114: 5. Think of the mighty power of Christ going into death: He broke the power of death; and He has come out of it. He says, “I ... have the keys of death and of hades”, Rev 1: 18. No one can take them out of His hand, and He uses them for the execution of His own will. Our dear sister has been put to sleep through Jesus and she enjoys now the greatest favour that anyone can possibly be enjoying; to be at rest in His presence, to enjoy the communications of His love and to be satisfied; and nothing can disturb that. While we are here, we may get touches of enjoyment of eternal things just for a moment, but because of what we are, in the mortal condition in which we are, we cannot sustain it. There is nothing to interrupt what she is enjoying; she is in His presence.

But He is coming, and He is coming for us, and He is going to come right out of heaven. The Lord Jesus will not stay where He is; He shall descend from heaven; He is coming for each one of us. He is not giving directions from afar or leaving us to find our own way, but He is coming to take us Himself; and it says, “thus we shall be always with the Lord”. What a wonderful moment that will be, and we are anticipating that moment when we shall all be forever with the Lord. You may ask what it will be like. I do not know. Ask Him. What will it be like to just be there? These bodies will be changed: our sister's body will be raised, and it will be changed; and we shall be caught up together to meet Him in the air. Think not only of those who have fallen asleep through Jesus, believers who have been taken in this dispensation, but the myriads upon myriads of the dead in Christ, going right back to the first one who died in faith: they will all be caught up, raised and changed to meet the Lord in the air. What a meeting that will be - myriads upon myriads - and we who believe will be among them. The work of God in each soul will be complete.

It has impressed us recently at home that in Revelation 21 you have the city coming down, formed of the work of God in the souls of persons; it is “pure gold, like pure glass”, v 18. Think of the purity of that work: it will come down out of heaven, and its radiance will illuminate the earth, and it will have the glory of God, v 10. That is the work of God, which the Spirit has formed in the souls of persons like you and me, which will then be completed and translated to be with Christ to shine in all its radiance. Beloved, what a prospect believers have: we shall see Jesus, and we shall be like Him.

I come to Psalm 23 because we are still here, but we are not left

alone. It is recorded in Hebrews, "I will not leave thee, neither will I forsake thee", chap 13: 5. What an assurance! The Lord Jesus has committed Himself to us. At the end of Matthew He said, "All power has been given me in heaven and upon earth", Matt 28: 18. There is no one greater. There is no one that can exercise greater power than Jesus. "All power has been given me ... And behold, I am with you all the days", v 20. The One who has all the resource, all the power to carry us through, is the One who is with us "all the days". The psalmist here knew that; He knew something of the divine presence, and he says -

Jehovah is my shepherd; I shall not want.

- I will not need another - "Jehovah is my shepherd". Everything I need, everything we need, we have in Christ. We have a poem about an old lady lying with nothing of this world's goods and she said -

I have Christ - what want I more?

(Mrs Mary J Walker)

The psalmist is saying that here and he says -

... though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.

Beloved, we go through the shadow of it; the Lord Jesus went into the actuality of it: He tasted death for every thing, Heb 2: 9. For the believer, the sting of death has been taken away, but we pass through its shadow. We have the consciousness of that as we are at such an occasion, that we move through a world where the shadow of death is on every hand, but he says, "thou art with me". We pray that our dear brother and all the family might prove that, that the Lord is with them. He says -

I will fear no evil: for thou art with me;
Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.

I think the rod may be a reference to the word of God guiding our path and the staff to His priestly service to sustain us in keeping with His word. How wonderful He is, "thy rod and thy staff". He sustains us in relation to what is living. Aaron's rod was living, it sprouted, Heb 9: 4. David says, "thy rod"; it is living; the word of God is living, and directs our path in a living and feeling way in relation to Christ Himself. He says, "and thy staff". What sympathy there is in the staff, what priestly service upholding His own. He does not pass us through anything that He has not passed through Himself, sin apart, but He knows, He understands

and He feels in a way that no one else can. I might say to someone, 'I feel sorry for you'. The Lord Jesus does not say that; He brings in the resource to lift you above the circumstance and to bring you into the very scene, in your spirit, where He is, in which everything is established and secure and where nothing can intrude. How wonderful a blessed Shepherd we have.

The psalmist says -

... thou art with me ...

Surely, goodness and loving-kindness shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of Jehovah for the length of the days.

What a privilege, "the house of Jehovah"; we are not there on our own: we have one another. That is part of God's loving kindness and goodness, that we have one another, and we can go on, enjoy together the great things that are in the house of Jehovah. It is part of His loving kindness and goodness.

I come to John, which is a very well-known passage; the Lord Jesus says, 'I have committed Myself to be with you; I want you to follow me'. There could be no greater committal than what He has made, "behold, I am with you all the days, until the completion of the age". Nothing will ever change that. He will never deviate from it, but He would say, if I have committed Myself to be with you, just follow Me. What a follower Peter became! He spoke of the sufferings of the Christ and the glory after. Peter knew what that was; he had seen both the glory on the Mount and the sufferings; he had seen them. Peter became a follower. The Lord would strengthen us to follow. We cannot follow in our own strength. We have the gift of the Holy Spirit, the One who would bring livingly into our hearts the glory of the person of our Lord Jesus, and cause our hearts to well forth in response to that blessed One. What a wonderful Saviour we have! An 'all the way home' Saviour! One who can carry us on His shoulders, One who would say to us, 'Just put your hand in mine'. When I was a boy we used to sing a hymn:

Take Thou our hand, Lord Jesus,
Thou knowest best;
Guide us at last, blest Saviour
To God's own rest,
We cannot tread without Thee

The pathway true;
We need thee near, whatever
We say or do.

Hymn 95 - Hymns For the Little Flock, 1951 Revision

How true that is. We need Him every hour.

I just commend these words to us. Our sister's portion is a very blessed one. She is not missing anything here because she is satisfied with Jesus. We miss her, and we are intended to, and the Lord Jesus understands that fully, but He has committed Himself to be with us and He will never leave us, neither will He forsake us. When Jacob was dying he said, "Behold, I die; and God will be with you", Gen 48: 21. May we prove the sense of that as we go forward; that the Lord is with us and supporting us and giving all the grace that is needed because the resources are all in Himself.

May the Lord help us, for His Name's sake.

Glasgow

1 December 2020

At the burial of Helen Newberry